

In the Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Original) A process for preparing case ready meat products for shipping and sale, the meat products thereby adapted to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale, comprising:
 - A. providing a plurality of a first nonfoam trays having a bottom and walls; the first trays having a plurality of separation structures; the separation structures adapted to cause the trays to denest automatically from other trays;
 - B. providing a plurality of second nonfoam trays having a bottom and walls; the second trays having a plurality of separation structures; whereby at least some of the separation structures on the second trays are positioned at locations on the second trays different from the locations at which corresponding separation structures on the first trays are located; the separation structures adapted to cause the trays to denest automatically from other trays;
 - C. whereby the first and second trays are provided in a stack in which at least some of the first trays are interleaved with at least some of the second trays in order to promote denesting of the trays in a dispensing station;
 - D. dispensing the trays from the stack in a dispensing machine;
 - E. placing case ready meat product into at least some of the trays, the meat product ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale; and
 - F. sealing at least some of the trays and meat products with a closure.
2. (Original) A process according to claim 1 wherein the separation structures comprise lugs located on said walls of said trays.
3. (Original) A process according to claim 2 wherein each tray contains at least 4 lugs.

4. (Original) A process according to claim 1 wherein at least some of the separation structures on the first tray are different in shape from at least some of the separation structures on the second tray.

5. (Original) A process according to claim 1 wherein the closures comprise film.

6. (Original) A process according to claim 1 wherein the trays are formed of material adapted to withstand automatic dishwasher cleaning and cooking of the meat product in the trays in an oven without substantial deformation of the trays.

7. (Original) A plurality of combinations according to claim 6, wherein the oven is a microwave oven.

8. (Original) A plurality of combinations according to claim 6, wherein the oven is a conventional oven.

9. (Original) A plurality of combinations according to claim 1, wherein the trays comprise a gas barrier.

10. (Original) A process for preparing case ready meat products for shipping and sale, the meat products thereby adapted to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale, comprising:

A. providing a plurality of a first nonfoam trays having a bottom and walls;
the first trays having a plurality of separation structures;
the separation structures adapted to cause the trays to denest automatically from other trays;

B. providing a plurality of second nonfoam trays having a bottom and walls;
the second trays having a plurality of separation structures;
whereby at least some of the separation structures on the second trays are shaped

differently than corresponding separation structures on the first trays;
the separation structures adapted to cause the trays to denest automatically from other trays;

C. whereby the first and second trays are provided in a stack in which at least some of the first trays are interleaved with at least some of the second trays in order to promote denesting of the trays in a dispensing station;

D. dispensing the trays from the stack in a dispensing machine;

E. placing case ready meat product into at least some of the trays, the meat product ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale; and

F. sealing at least some of the trays and meat products with a closure.

11. (Original) A process according to claim 10 wherein the separation structures comprise lugs located on said walls of said trays.

12. (Original) A plurality of combinations according to claim 11 wherein each at least 4 lugs.

13. (Original) A process according to claim 10 wherein at least some of the separation structures on the first tray are located at the same locations on the first tray as at least some of the separation structures are located on the second tray.

14. (Original) A plurality of combinations according to claim 10 wherein at least some of the separation structures on the first tray are not located at the same locations on the first tray as at least some of the separation structures are located on the second tray.

15. (Original) A process according to claim 10 which the closures comprise film.

16. (Original) A process according to claim 10 wherein the trays are formed of material adapted to withstand automatic dishwasher cleaning and cooking of the meat product

in the trays in an oven without substantial deformation of the trays.

17. (Original) A process according to claim 16, wherein the oven is a microwave oven.

18. (Original) A plurality of combinations according to claim 16, wherein the oven is a conventional oven.

19. (Original) A process according to claim 10, wherein the trays comprise a gas barrier.

20. (Currently Amended). A process for preparing case ready meat products for shipping and sale, the meat products thereby adapted to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale, comprising:

- A. providing a plurality of a first nonfoam trays having a bottom, and nearly vertical sidewalls walls that include a pair of smooth, contoured corner portions and a center portion having a plurality of vertical ribs, and a flange extending outwardly from an upper portion of the sidewalls that includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch;
the first trays having a plurality of separation structures;
the separation structures adapted to cause the trays to denest automatically from other trays;
- B. providing a plurality of second nonfoam trays having a bottom, and nearly vertical sidewalls walls that include a pair of smooth, contoured corner portions and a center portion having a plurality of vertical ribs, and a flange extending outwardly from an upper portion of the sidewalls that includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch;
the second trays having a plurality of separation structures;
whereby the separation structures on the second trays are positioned at locations

on the second trays different from the locations at which corresponding separation structures on the first trays are located and are adapted not to nest with separation structures on the first trays;

the separation structures adapted to cause the trays to denest automatically from other trays;

- C. whereby the first and second trays are provided in a stack in a manner so as to automatically denest in a dispensing station;
- D. dispensing the trays from the stack in a dispensing station;
- E. placing case ready meat product into at least some of the trays, the meat product ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale; and
- F. sealing at least some of the trays and meat products with a closure.

21. (Original) A process according to claim 20 wherein at least some of the separation structures on the first trays are positioned on the first trays at locations different than the positions on the second trays at which at least some of the separation structures on the second trays are located, in order to cause separation structures on the first trays not to nest with separation structures on the second trays.

22. (Original) A process according to claim 20 wherein at least some of the separation structures on the first trays are shaped differently from at least some of the separation structures on the second trays, in order to cause separation structures on the first trays not to nest with separation structures on the second trays.

23. (Canceled)

24. (Original) A process according to claim 20 wherein the separation structures comprise lugs located on said walls of said trays.

25. (Original) A process according to claim 21 wherein each tray contains at least

4 lugs.

26. (Original) A process according to claim 20 wherein the trays are formed of material adapted to withstand automatic dishwasher cleaning and cooking of the meat product in the trays in an oven without substantial deformation of the trays.

27. (Original) A process according to claim 26, wherein the oven is a microwave oven.

28. (Original) A process according to claim 26, wherein the oven is a conventional oven.

29. (Original) A process according to claim 20, wherein the trays comprise a gas barrier.

30. (New) A method for packaging a meat product for shipping and sale, the method comprising:

interleaving a plurality of first non-foam trays that have a first set of separation structures with a plurality of second non-foam trays that have a second set of separation structures to form a stack of trays, wherein the first set of separation structures differ from the second set of separation structures so as to maintain adjacent trays in the stack of trays at least a predetermined distance apart;

automatically dispensing the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays one at a time from the stack of trays using a dispensing machine;

placing the meat product in the dispensed trays;

filling the dispensed trays with an atmosphere comprising oxygen and carbon dioxide;

and

automatically sealing the trays containing the meat product and the oxygen and carbon dioxide atmosphere with a closure to provide a case ready meat product that is ready to be

displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale.

31. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first non-foam trays have a bottom and a plurality of structurally rigid sidewalls.

32. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the first non-foam trays further include a flange extending outwardly from an upper portion of the sidewalls, wherein the flange includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch.

33. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the bottom and the plurality of sidewalls define a single, substantially rectangular cavity.

34. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the sidewalls on the first non-foam trays are substantially vertical.

35. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the sidewalls on the first non-foam trays include a plurality of vertical ribs.

36. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein at least some of the vertical ribs on the sidewalls of the first non-foam trays curve around a joint between the sidewalls of the first non-foam trays and the bottom of the first non-foam trays to extend into the bottom of the first non-foam trays.

37. (New) The method of Claim 36, wherein each sidewall has a center portion and two corner portions, and wherein the two corner portions are free of vertical ribs.

38. (New) The method of Claim 37, wherein the first non-foam trays include a lower portion and an upper portion that are divided by a ledge that encircles the periphery of each first non-foam tray.

39. (New) The method of Claim 38, wherein the ledge bisects at least some of the vertical ribs.

40. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein filling the dispensed trays with the meat product comprises automatically filling the dispensed trays with the meat product using automatic filling equipment.

41. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first and second non-foam trays are formed of a material adapted to withstand automatic dishwasher cleaning and cooking of the meat product in an oven without substantial deformation of the first and second non-foam trays.

42. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the bottom of the first non-foam trays further comprise a plurality of ribs.

43. (New) The method of Claim 32, wherein the length of the downwardly extending lip is substantially uniform around the entire periphery of the first non-foam trays.

44. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein in the stack of trays, adjacent first non-foam trays are separated by at least one of the second non-foam trays.

45. (New) The method of Claim 30, further comprising applying an optical indicia to the sealed trays.

46. (New) The method of Claim 45, wherein the optical indicia comprises a bar code.

47. (New) The method of Claim 45, further comprising shipping the sealed trays to a point-of-sale location.

48. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays have the same shape, and wherein the first set of separation structures comprise lugs located in first positions on the first non-foam trays and the second set of separation structures comprise lugs located in second positions on the second non-foam trays that are different from the first positions.

49. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the first non-foam trays include a substantially rectangular inner cavity.

50. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein first non-foam trays are substantially rectangular in shape and wherein the first set of separation structures include lugs located in at least two corners of the first non-foam trays.

51. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first non-foam trays comprise polypropylene trays.

52. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first set of separation structures are adapted to cause the first trays to automatically and reliably denest from the second trays.

53. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein all of the trays in the stack of trays are separated by a predetermined distance even after shipping and handling.

54. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the vertical ribs on at least some of the sidewalls have a horizontal width that is less than the distance between adjacent vertical ribs.

55. (New) The method of Claim of Claim 35, wherein the plurality of vertical ribs are provided on more than 50% of the surface of the sidewalls.

56. (New) The method of Claim 37, wherein the plurality of vertical ribs are provided on substantially the entirety of the center portions of the sidewalls.

57. (New) A method for packaging a product consisting essentially of meat for shipping and sale, the method comprising:

loading a tray dispensing machine with a stack of non-foam first and second trays that are interleaved together such that adjacent first trays in the stack are physically separated from each other and adjacent second trays in the stack are physically separated from each other, wherein the first and second trays have a bottom and a plurality of semi-rigid, nearly vertical,

sidewalls that define a substantially rectangular cavity therebetween, the sidewalls including a plurality of support ribs, and wherein the first trays have a plurality of separation structures configured in a first pattern and the second trays have a plurality of separation structures configured in a second pattern that is different from the first pattern so as to maintain adjacent trays in the stack of trays at least a predetermined distance apart even when the stack of trays is subjected to compressive forces during handling and shipping;

automatically dispensing the first trays and the second trays one at a time from the stack of trays using a dispensing machine;

placing the product consisting essentially of meat in the dispensed trays; and

automatically sealing the trays filled with the product consisting essentially of meat with a closure to provide a case ready meat product that is ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale.

58. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein the first trays further include a flange extending outwardly from an upper periphery of the sidewalls, wherein the flange includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch.

59. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein at least some of the vertical ribs on the sidewalls of the first and second trays extend into the bottom of the first and second trays.

60. (New) The method of Claim 59, wherein each sidewall has a center portion and two corner portions, and wherein the two corner portions are free of vertical ribs.

61. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein the first and second trays include a lower portion and an upper portion that are divided by a ledge that encircles the periphery of each tray and that bisects at least some of the vertical ribs.

62. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein the bottom of the first and second trays further comprise a plurality of ribs.

63. (New) The method of Claim of Claim 57, wherein the plurality of support ribs

are provided on more than 50% of the surface of the sidewalls.

64. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein the plurality of support ribs are provided on substantially the entirety of a center portion of each sidewall.

65. (New) A method for packaging a meat product for shipping and sale, the method comprising:

interleaving a plurality of first non-foam trays that have a first set of separation structures with a plurality of second non-foam trays that have a second set of separation structures to form a stack of trays, wherein the first set of separation structures differ from the second set of separation structures, wherein the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays have a bottom and a plurality of semi-rigid and substantially vertical sidewalls that include a plurality of vertical ribs, the bottom and sidewalls defining a single, substantially rectangular inner cavity, and wherein the first set of separation structures and the second set of separation structures maintain adjacent trays in the stack a predetermined distance apart;

automatically dispensing the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays one at a time from the stack of trays using a dispensing machine;

placing the meat product in the dispensed trays;

filling the dispensed trays with an atmosphere comprising oxygen and carbon dioxide;

and

automatically sealing the trays filled with the meat product and the oxygen and carbon dioxide atmosphere with a closure to provide a case ready meat product that is ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale.

66. (New) The method of Claim 65, wherein each sidewall has a center portion and two corner portions, and wherein the two corner portions are free of vertical ribs.

67. (New) The method of Claim 66, wherein the first non-foam trays further include a flange extending outwardly from the upper portion of the sidewalls, wherein the flange includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch.

68. (New) The method of Claim 66, wherein at least some of the vertical ribs on the sidewalls of the first non-foam trays curve around a joint between the sidewalls of the tray and the bottom of the tray to extend into the bottom of the tray.

69. (New) The method of Claim 68, wherein the first non-foam trays include a lower portion and an upper portion that are divided by a ledge that encircles the periphery of each tray and that bisects at least some of the vertical ribs.

70. (New) The method of Claim 69, further comprising applying a bar code to the dispensed trays with case ready meat.

71. (New) The method of Claim 70, wherein the first non-foam trays further comprise a plurality of ribs that extend substantially the width of the bottom of the tray.

72. (New) The method of Claim 71, wherein the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays have the same shape, and wherein the first set of separation structures comprise lugs located in first positions on the first non-foam trays and the second set of separation structures comprise lugs located in second positions on the second non-foam trays that are different from the first positions.

73. (New) The method of Claim 72, wherein the vertical ribs on at least some of the sidewalls have a horizontal width that is less than the distance between adjacent vertical ribs.

74. (New) The method of Claim 73, wherein the length of the downwardly extending lip is substantially uniform around the entire periphery of the first non-foam trays.

75. (New) The method of Claim 74, wherein the first set of separation structures include lugs located in at least two corners of the non-foam trays.

76. (New) The method of Claim of Claim 65, wherein the plurality of vertical ribs are provided on more than 50% of the surface of the sidewalls.

77. (New) A method for packaging a meat product for shipping and sale, the method comprising:

interleaving a plurality of first non-foam trays that have a first set of separation structures with a plurality of second non-foam trays that have a second set of separation structures that differ from the second set of separation structures to form a stack of trays in which adjacent trays in the stack are maintained a predetermined distance apart, wherein the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays have a bottom and a plurality of vertical sidewalls that include a plurality of vertical ribs, the bottom and sidewalls defining a single inner cavity;

automatically dispensing the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays one at a time from the stack of trays using a dispensing machine;

placing the meat product in the dispensed trays; and

automatically sealing the trays filled with the meat product with a closure to provide a case ready meat product that is ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale.

STATEMENT OF STATUS OF CLAIMS AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGES TO THE CLAIMS

Status of Pending Claims:

Claims 1-22 and 24-77 are currently pending in this application. Claim 23 has been cancelled. Claims 1-19, 21-22 and 24-29 remain unchanged from the original patent that the present application seeks to reissue. Claim 20 is amended in the concurrently *Preliminary Amendment* that is part of this combined submission. Claims 30-77 are new claims that are added to the application in the concurrently *Preliminary Amendment* that is part of this combined submission.

Support for Changes to the Claims:

The following paragraphs identifies support in the specification for each amendment to the claims and for each newly added claim contained in the Preliminary Amendment.

Claim 20 has been amended to recite that the first and second nonfoam trays have "nearly vertical sidewalls that include a pair of smooth, contoured corner portions and a center portion having a plurality of vertical ribs." Support for this amendment may be found, for example, at Col. 3, lines 46-51, 58-64; Col. 8, lines 1-3; and FIGS. 1-2, 2B and 3-12. Claim 20 has likewise been amended to recite that the trays include "a flange extending outwardly from an upper portion of the sidewalls that includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch." Support for this amendment may be found, for example, at Col. 8, lines 3-16 and FIGS 1-12.

Claims 30-77 are newly added to the application. These claims are repeated below with citations to the specification in brackets identifying support for each recitation of the claims.

30. A method for packaging a meat product for shipping and sale, [*see, e.g., Claim 1*] the method comprising:

interleaving a plurality of first non-foam trays that have a first set of separation structures with a plurality of second non-foam trays that have a second set of separation structures to form a stack of trays, [*see, e.g., Claim 1*] wherein the first set of separation

structures differ from the second set of separation structures [*see, e.g., Claim 1*] so as to maintain adjacent trays in the stack of trays at least a predetermined distance apart [*see, e.g., Col. 8, lines 61-64*];

automatically dispensing the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays one at a time from the stack of trays using a dispensing machine [*see, e.g., Claim 1; Col. 7, lines 59-64*];

placing the meat product in the dispensed trays [*see, e.g., Claim 1*];

filling the dispensed trays with an atmosphere comprising oxygen and carbon dioxide [*see, e.g., Claim 9; Col. 3, line 61 through Col. 4, lines 3*]; and

automatically sealing the trays containing the meat product and the oxygen and carbon dioxide atmosphere with a closure to provide a case ready meat product that is ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale [*see, e.g., Claims 1 and 9; Col. 3, line 61 through Col. 4, line 3; Col. 10, lines 45-47*].

31. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first non-foam trays have a bottom and a plurality of structurally rigid sidewalls [*see, e.g., Claim 1; Col. 3, lines 46-51; Col. 7, line 65 through Col. 8, line 28*].

32. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the first non-foam trays further include a flange extending outwardly from an upper portion of the sidewalls, wherein the flange includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch [*see, e.g., Col. 8, lines 3-16; FIGS. 1-12*].

33. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the bottom and the plurality of sidewalls define a single, substantially rectangular cavity [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*].

34. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the sidewalls on the first non-foam trays are substantially vertical [*see, e.g., Col. 3, lines 58-64; FIGS. 1-2, 2B and 3-12*].

35. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the sidewalls on the first non-foam trays include a plurality of vertical ribs [*see, e.g., Col. 3, lines 46-51; Col. 8, lines 1-3; FIGS.*

1-12].

36. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein at least some of the vertical ribs on the sidewalls of the first non-foam trays curve around a joint between the sidewalls of the first non-foam trays and the bottom of the first non-foam trays to extend into the bottom of the first non-foam trays [*see, e.g., Col. 8, lines 18-20; FIGS. 1-12*].

37. (New) The method of Claim 36, wherein each sidewall has a center portion and two corner portions, and wherein the two corner portions are free of vertical ribs [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*].

38. (New) The method of Claim 37, wherein the first non-foam trays include a lower portion and an upper portion that are divided by a ledge that encircles the periphery of each first non-foam tray [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*].

39. (New) The method of Claim 38, wherein the ledge bisects at least some of the vertical ribs [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*].

40. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein filling the dispensed trays with the meat product comprises automatically filling the dispensed trays with the meat product using automatic filling equipment [*see, e.g., Col. 10, lines 41-45*].

41. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first and second non-foam trays are formed of a material adapted to withstand automatic dishwasher cleaning and cooking of the meat product in an oven without substantial deformation of the first and second non-foam trays [*see, e.g., Claim 6*].

42. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the bottom of the first non-foam trays further comprise a plurality of ribs [*see, e.g., Col. 8, lines 16-17; FIGS. 2-12*].

43. (New) The method of Claim 32, wherein the length of the downwardly extending lip is substantially uniform around the entire periphery of the first non-foam trays

[*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-2**].

44. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein in the stack of trays, adjacent first non-foam trays are separated by at least one of the second non-foam trays [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1**].

45. (New) The method of Claim 30, further comprising applying an optical indicia to the sealed trays [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 10, lines 47-53**].

46. (New) The method of Claim 45, wherein the optical indicia comprises a bar code [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 10, lines 47-53**].

47. (New) The method of Claim 45, further comprising shipping the sealed trays to a point-of-sale location [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 10, lines 53-58**].

48. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays have the same shape, and wherein the first set of separation structures comprise lugs located in first positions on the first non-foam trays and the second set of separation structures comprise lugs located in second positions on the second non-foam trays that are different from the first positions [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1; Col. 5, lines 17-25**].

49. (New) The method of Claim 31, wherein the first non-foam trays include a substantially rectangular inner cavity [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

50. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein first non-foam trays are substantially rectangular in shape and wherein the first set of separation structures include lugs located in at least two corners of the first non-foam trays [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-5**].

51. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first non-foam trays comprise polypropylene trays [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 3, line 39**].

52. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein the first set of separation structures are adapted to cause the first trays to automatically and reliably denest from the second trays

[*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1**].

53. (New) The method of Claim 30, wherein all of the trays in the stack of trays are separated by a predetermined distance even after shipping and handling [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 5, lines 24-44; Col. 8, lines 61-64**].

54. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the vertical ribs on at least some of the sidewalls have a horizontal width that is less than the distance between adjacent vertical ribs [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

55. (New) The method of Claim of Claim 35, wherein the plurality of vertical ribs are provided on more than 50% of the surface of the sidewalls [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

56. (New) The method of Claim 37, wherein the plurality of vertical ribs are provided on substantially the entirety of the center portions of the sidewalls [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

57. (New) A method for packaging a product consisting essentially of meat for shipping and sale [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1**], the method comprising:

loading a tray dispensing machine with a stack of non-foam first and second trays that are interleaved together such that adjacent first trays in the stack are physically separated from each other and adjacent second trays in the stack are physically separated from each other [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1; Col. 5, lines 24-44; Col. 8, lines 61-64**], wherein the first and second trays have a bottom and a plurality of semi-rigid, nearly vertical, sidewalls that define a substantially rectangular cavity therebetween [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1; Col. 3, lines 46-51; Col. 7, line 65 through Col. 8, line 28; FIGS. 1-12**], the sidewalls including a plurality of support ribs [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 3, lines 46-51; Col. 8, lines 1-3; FIGS. 1-12**], and wherein the first trays have a plurality of separation structures configured in a first pattern and the second trays have a plurality of separation structures configured in a second pattern that is different from the first pattern so as to maintain adjacent trays in the stack of trays at least a predetermined

distance apart even when the stack of trays is subjected to compressive forces during handling and shipping [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1; Col. 5, lines 24-44; Col. 8, lines 61-64**];

automatically dispensing the first trays and the second trays one at a time from the stack of trays using a dispensing machine [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1; Col. 7, lines 59-64**];

placing the product consisting essentially of meat in the dispensed trays [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1**]; and

automatically sealing the trays filled with the product consisting essentially of meat with a closure to provide a case ready meat product that is ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale [*see, e.g.*, **Claims 1 and 9; Col. 3, line 61 through Col. 4, line 3; Col. 10, lines 45-47**].

58. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein the first trays further include a flange extending outwardly from an upper periphery of the sidewalls, wherein the flange includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 8, lines 3-16; FIGS. 1-12**].

59. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein at least some of the vertical ribs on the sidewalls of the first and second trays extend into the bottom of the first and second trays [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 8, lines 18-20; FIGS. 1-12**].

60. (New) The method of Claim 59, wherein each sidewall has a center portion and two corner portions, and wherein the two corner portions are free of vertical ribs [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

61. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein the first and second trays include a lower portion and an upper portion that are divided by a ledge that encircles the periphery of each tray and that bisects at least some of the vertical ribs [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

62. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein the bottom of the first and second trays further comprise a plurality of ribs [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 8, lines 16-17; FIGS. 1-12**].

63. (New) The method of Claim of Claim 57, wherein the plurality of support ribs are provided on more than 50% of the surface of the sidewalls [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*].

64. (New) The method of Claim 57, wherein the plurality of support ribs are provided on substantially the entirety of a center portion of each sidewall [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*].

65. (New) A method for packaging a meat product for shipping and sale [*see, e.g., Claim 1*], the method comprising:

interleaving a plurality of first non-foam trays that have a first set of separation structures with a plurality of second non-foam trays that have a second set of separation structures to form a stack of trays [*see, e.g., Claim 1*], wherein the first set of separation structures differ from the second set of separation structures [*see, e.g., Claim 1*], wherein the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays have a bottom and a plurality of semi-rigid and substantially vertical sidewalls that include a plurality of vertical ribs [*see, e.g., Claim 1; Col. 3, lines 46-51; Col. 7, line 65 through Col. 8, line 28*], the bottom and sidewalls defining a single, substantially rectangular inner cavity [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*], and wherein the first set of separation structures and the second set of separation structures maintain adjacent trays in the stack a predetermined distance apart [*see, e.g., Col. 5, lines 24-44; Col. 8, lines 61-64*];

automatically dispensing the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays one at a time from the stack of trays using a dispensing machine [*see, e.g., Claim 1; Col. 7, lines 59-64*];

placing the meat product in the dispensed trays [*see, e.g., Claim 1*];

filling the dispensed trays with an atmosphere comprising oxygen and carbon dioxide [*see, e.g., Claim 9; Col. 3, line 61 through Col. 4, line 3*]; and

automatically sealing the trays filled with the meat product and the oxygen and carbon dioxide atmosphere with a closure to provide a case ready meat product that is ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point of sale [*see, e.g., Claims 1 and 9; Col. 3,*

line 61 through Col. 4, line 3; Col. 10, lines 45-47].

66. (New) The method of Claim 65, wherein each sidewall has a center portion and two corner portions, and wherein the two corner portions are free of vertical ribs [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*].

67. (New) The method of Claim 66, wherein the first non-foam trays further include a flange extending outwardly from the upper portion of the sidewalls, wherein the flange includes a downwardly extending lip having a length of at least 3/16 of an inch [*see, e.g., Col. 8, lines 3-16; FIGS. 1-12*].

68. (New) The method of Claim 66, wherein at least some of the vertical ribs on the sidewalls of the first non-foam trays curve around a joint between the sidewalls of the tray and the bottom of the tray to extend into the bottom of the tray [*see, e.g., Col. 8, lines 18-20; FIGS. 1-12*].

69. (New) The method of Claim 68, wherein the first non-foam trays include a lower portion and an upper portion that are divided by a ledge that encircles the periphery of each tray and that bisects at least some of the vertical ribs [*see, e.g., FIGS. 1-12*].

70. (New) The method of Claim 69, further comprising applying a bar code to the dispensed trays with case ready meat [*see, e.g., Col. 10, lines 47-53*].

71. (New) The method of Claim 70, wherein the first non-foam trays further comprise a plurality of ribs that extend substantially the width of the bottom of the tray [*see, e.g., Col. 8, lines 16-17; FIGS. 2-12*].

72. (New) The method of Claim 71, wherein the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays have the same shape, and wherein the first set of separation structures comprise lugs located in first positions on the first non-foam trays and the second set of separation structures comprise lugs located in second positions on the second non-foam trays that are different from the first positions [*see, e.g., Claim 1; Col. 5, lines 17-25*].

73. (New) The method of Claim 72, wherein the vertical ribs on at least some of the sidewalls have a horizontal width that is less than the distance between adjacent vertical ribs [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

74. (New) The method of Claim 73, wherein the length of the downwardly extending lip is substantially uniform around the entire periphery of the first non-foam trays [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

75. (New) The method of Claim 74, wherein the first set of separation structures include lugs located in at least two corners of the non-foam trays [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-5**].

76. (New) The method of Claim of Claim 65, wherein the plurality of vertical ribs are provided on more than 50% of the surface of the sidewalls [*see, e.g.*, **FIGS. 1-12**].

77. (New) A method for packaging a meat product for shipping and sale [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1**], the method comprising:

interleaving a plurality of first non-foam trays that have a first set of separation structures with a plurality of second non-foam trays that have a second set of separation structures that differ from the second set of separation structures [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1**] to form a stack of trays in which adjacent trays in the stack are maintained a predetermined distance apart [*see, e.g.*, **Col. 5, lines 24-244; Col. 8, lines 61-64**], wherein the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays have a bottom and a plurality of vertical sidewalls that include a plurality of vertical ribs, the bottom and sidewalls defining a single inner cavity [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1; Col. 3, lines 46-51; Col. 7, line 65 through Col. 8, line 28; FIGS. 1-12**];

automatically dispensing the first non-foam trays and the second non-foam trays one at a time from the stack of trays using a dispensing machine [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1; Col. 7, lines 59-64**];

placing the meat product in the dispensed trays [*see, e.g.*, **Claim 1**]; and

automatically sealing the trays filled with the meat product with a closure to provide a case ready meat product that is ready to be displayed for sale in a display case at a retail point

In re: Reissue of U.S. Patent No. 6,430,467
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Filed: Concurrently Herewith
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of sale [*see, e.g.*, Col. 10, lines 45-47].

Respectfully submitted,



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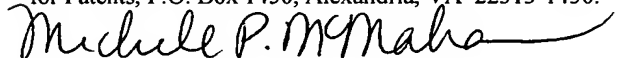
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